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Staying Cyber Secure at the Holidays

Springfield, IL - With COVID-19 restrictions around the nation, shopping virtually has become more than just a convenience and it's important to take steps to stay safe when shopping online, especially at the holidays.

From the convenience of easily making household and grocery purchases to an endless offering of gifts, online shopping has grown in popularity at exponential rates during 2020. Increased online traffic also makes it more lucrative for cyber thieves to trick buyers into scams and steal personal information for financial gain.

“Shopping virtually brings many benefits, including the ability to limit our exposure to COVID-19, but it also opens up shoppers to the myriad of online threats,” stated Jennifer Ricker, Acting Secretary at the Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT). “We want to help our Illinois residents benefit from the convenience of online shopping, while remaining secure through improved cyber awareness.”

Online shopping best practices recommended by the National Cyber Security Alliance include:

- **Think before you click:** Beware of ads encouraging users to click on links, account warnings and shipping notifications. If you receive notice or an enticing offer, do not click on the link. Instead, go directly to the company's website to verify the offer is legitimate.
- **Do your homework:** Cyber thieves are fond of setting up fake e-commerce sites. Prior to making a purchase, read reviews to hear what others say about the merchant. In addition, look for a physical location and any customer service information. It's also a good idea to call the merchant to confirm that they are legitimate.
- **Consider your payment options:** Using a credit card is often recommended over a debit card, as there are more consumer protections for credit cards if something goes awry.
- **Watch what you give away:** Be alert to the kinds of information being collected to complete your transaction. If the merchant is requesting more data than you feel comfortable sharing, cancel the transaction. You only need to fill out required fields at checkout and should never save your payment information in your profile.
- **Keep tabs on your bank and credit card statements:** Be sure to continuously check your accounts for any unauthorized activity. Good recordkeeping goes hand-in-hand with managing your cybersecurity.

Finally, when shopping from the comfort of your home, remember to connect with care. “Make sure your home wireless network is password protected. Adopting a strong password is the best way to protect your personal information such as banking information and other sensitive material you’d prefer to remain private,” said IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau.

Educate yourself on cyber scams and fraud to ensure you do not become a victim. View resources from [Department of Innovation & Technology \(DoIT\)](#) and [Illinois Emergency Management Agency \(IEMA\)](#) to learn more.

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